CS1. Studies on national media research capability as a contextual domain of the sources of ROs

The aim of the **first case study** is to describe and analyse the **countries' monitoring capability:** the ability and possibilities of various agents to observe the developments of the media and the changes in society emanating from the media transformations, as well as related risks and opportunities for deliberative communication, and applying the obtained knowledge in making media political decisions.

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Risks and Opportunities Related to Media and Journalism Studies (2000–2020). Case Study on the National Research and Monitoring Capabilities

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Executive summary

Analysing the scientific publications dedicated to the development of journalism and media in Latvia during the twenty years from 2000 to 2020, this article presents conclusions about the research basis that could affect the state of deliberative communication. Academic studies content that reflects the situation of journalism, media use, legal and ethical regulation and media-related competencies, describes the research environment, research issues and their scientific quality.

Analysis of the bibliographic data (317 publications) shows that the media and journalism landscape in Latvia has been studied in a fragmented manner. The quality of media studies and communication research in Latvia is low. Due to a lack of resources, the number of studies is limited, and the scale of internationally referenced publications is small, as well as the studies cover a limited range of media and journalism problems.

The risks of deliberative communication are related to the gaps in knowledge and lack of impact of the research on both media policy and the public. This is a result of the low level of research, small number of experts, sporadic and non-continuity of data, lack of original and creative approaches in the research field, weak international networking, and exchange. The recent developments in the field (more structured science funding system, requirements for scientific publications, young doctors in the field) are indicating opportunities to diminish the risks. However, this is not possible without strengthening research in the areas of media law, media economy and management as well as regarding new challenges for journalism caused by technological development. Limited research opportunities mean that Latvian media researchers, if possible, follow the current trends in research, but are unable to make an in-depth contribution to the development of communication and media theories.

1. Introduction

According to the tradition of social sciences research in Baltic states, communication and media studies mostly focus on each country's unique experience and analyse different ways of solving similar problems in the development of the media and journalism (Vihalemm, 2001; Balčytiene, 2012). Latvia is as a part of Eastern Europe, and this fact automatically assumes that the country belongs to the part of the world associated with 20th century history and its aftermath, identifying the countries as a post-communist and post-soviet space with all the consequences thereof. This status helps in contrasting Eastern Europe (EE) (often Central and Eastern Europe or CEE) and Western Europe, judging such by the quality of democracy, political culture, and level of economic development. Media environment studies are dominated by this contrast, and it also

identifies the unstable status of CEE communication and media studies (Demeter, 2020, Harro-Loit, 2015; Stetka, 14 June 2015), highlighting the compliance of Baltic and/or CEE with the principles of Western media practices among analytical criteria.

Context 1: Latvia in numbers

Population: According to the data of the Statistical Yearbook of Latvia, in 2020, Latvia (64,500 square kilometres) had a population of 1.9 million (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2021).

Minorities and languages: Latvia is not ethnically homogenous: 62% of the population is Latvian, 25% Russian, 3.2% Belarusian, 2.2% Ukrainian, 2.1% Polish, and 4% other. Sixty-one percent of the Latvian population speaks Latvian as the first language, 36% – Russian, 3% – other (Central Statistical Bureau, 2018). The largest historical regions of Latvia (Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme) speak Latvian most in the family (75%–91%). However, the Eastern region of Latgale paints a different picture: 60% of the population speaks Russian in the family, 39% speaks Latvian (Central Statistical Bureau, 2020). In the capital city Riga, more of the population speaks Russian at home (56%), whereas 43% use Latvian.

Context 2: Latvia's media landscape and media system

To understand the development of Latvia's media environment and public service media (Public Service Media, PSM), the analytical approach of the media system is mostly used. On the one hand, it offers an internationally acclaimed structure and stable tradition (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), on the other hand, it has led to the conclusion that criteria characteristic to Western countries are only partially usable for CEE or EE media systems (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015, Gross, 2004). Moreover, in this approach, Latvia (or the Baltic states) is analysed together with other CEE countries without focusing on the historical specifics and context of their media culture. Adapting the principles of Western media practice to the new, independent CEE media environments has highlighted difficulties related to media practice and journalism quality principles defined in normative theories (McQuail, 2010). Among other problems on the list compiled by several authors, political influence on the media, insufficient financing of public service media, clientelism in the relationships with information sources (Balčytiene, 2012; Balčytiene, 2015, Örnebring, 2012, Bajomi-Lazar, 2015), problems in journalism ethics (Dimants, 2018) can only partially describe the Baltic media environment in the transition from a centralised, state-controlled system to independent media activity in a free market.

Karol Jakubowicz (2004) has criticised the 'idealisation' based approach of Western media criteria usage for the evaluation of CEE media systems. Analysing the road of media systems and PSM transformation, he focuses on 'imitation' and 'mimetic development' so that CEE media can come close to the Western PSM level. These attempts mean copying the practice models of Western European and North American PSM (Jakubowicz, 2004), which is comparable to a moving target (Gross, 2004). In fact, copying the Western approach in media policy, as per Jakubowicz, has not helped to escape the 'atavistic' direction of the media system development, which means that CEE countries, including Latvia, have often attempted to conjoin the 'new' and 'old' system when creating a new media structure and new PSM, and these PSM still represent the hegemonic and guardianship functions as the new political elite try to preserve the paternalistic orientation in media regulation.

In the analysis of Latvia's media system development, the peculiarities of small countries' media systems are rarely considered (Puppis, 2009), nor is the coexistence of PSM and the powerful commercial media system battling for resources and users compared (Sehl et al., 2020; Nielsen, 2014), and on the political level and audience discourse, the necessity of PSM funding and efficiency is doubted. At the same time, PSM, just like other media, must continue developing in the environment of technology and social change, where PSM are still assessed by Western criteria.

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Four criteria have traditionally been employed to characterise media systems (Hallin, Mancini, 2004): the role of the state, the influence of politics, regulation level, and the professional quality of journalism. The liberal structure of Latvian media regulation allowed a diverse media system to develop; at the same time, the media environment is characterised by oligopolistic competition and a high level of concentration (Jastramskis et.al, 2017). Using Hallin and Manchini's (2004) media system models, the authors of the Democracy Audit of Latvia (2014) described the Latvian media system as hybrid, as it lacks a dominant paradigm (Skudra et al., 2014). The important role of the market in media landscape regulation and the lack of support for professionally competitive and cultural media, are, according to the authors, indicative of a liberal model. Democratic corporate model features are evidenced by the efforts to strengthen public service media (PSM) and a few media professionalisation activities in the country. The presence of political parallelism in the media environment and the great influence of political public relations on media content mark the signs of a polarised pluralistic model.

The three models of media systems developed by Hallin and Mancini describe Western European and United States media systems and have always been difficult to adapt for the analysis of the media environment of Latvia and other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.

Media market and audiences: Media choice in Latvia is largely determined by ethnic group and geographical factors. Representatives of different ethnical groups in Latvia acquire their daily information from different sources; Latvians generally trust and use the media in Latvian, whereas the Russian-speaking prefer the TV channels controlled by the Russian government (Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome, 2017, 2018, 2020). Survey data show that the population of Latvia still prefers television over other media (89% of respondents) (Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome, 2020). 83% of the population listen to the radio, 79% read news on the internet, 72% use social media, and 71% read the press in print or online.

The Latvijas Fakti (2018) study shows the influence of the Russian media in Latvia, as 38% of the respondents use Russian media. Latvijas Fakti (2018) analysis of the most popular media reveals that commercial media are the most popular, followed by public and regional media.

According to Eurobarometer data (Standard Eurobarometer, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Statista 2019) data, the population of Latvia trusts the radio and television the most. Moreover, the average level of trust in traditional audio-visual media among Latvian respondents is higher than the EU average by 6%-12% (from 58% in 2010 to 63% in 2016). Trust in printed press in Latvia is similar to the EU average (approx. 41%). Since 2010, the population of Latvia has trusted internet media more than the EU average (from 46% in 2013 to 34% in 2018, as compared to EU 35%). A similar trend can be observed with social media use: Latvia's respondents reveal a higher level of trust (21%-27%) than the EU average (around 20%).

The liberal structure of Latvian media regulation has not only facilitated the development of internet media, but also poses problems with the responsibility of players in the digital sphere. The definition of internet media is general in media laws in Latvia, and media founders are not obliged to register with the media registry. This is the main reason why information providers who offer different hybrid media and hybrid journalism formats without identifying their goals, sources of revenue, and owners, have also developed their activities in Latvia's digital environment (Polis, 26 May 2017).

This has caused various problems, such as the rapid development of fake news sites, and regular copyright infringement as internet media republishes content by other media. As with traditional media, the content available on the internet is influenced by political public relations and communication aimed at ruining the reputation of political competitors and interfering in their privacy. At the same time, Latvia is improving the regulation of the monitoring of political advertising in the internet environment.

While some internet news portals have formulated user rules, only a few have codes of professional ethics. Although user-generated content is monitored and edited by internet media organisations, the environment of internet media users is characterised by aggressive communication, verbal attacks and hate speech. Law enforcement institutions in Latvia are gradually developing practices to prevent hate speech in the digital environment.

Analysis of digital environment pluralism indicators of Media Pluralism Monitor (2020) show that the basic protection indicator data reflects low risk. The society of Latvia can use universal reach to media and access to the internet; up to eighteen per cent of the population use the internet on a regular basis. General Laws protect freedom of expression; this is clearly defined in law and the norms apply to the online environment.

Latvia has adequate regulation to guarantee net neutrality, and in recent years there has been no violation of net neutrality by the government. According to Media Pluralism Monitor 2021 (MPM) data in 2020, in Latvia a low risk is still preserved in the field of Fundamental Protection that refers to the protection of freedom of expression, protection of right to information and access to the internet, independence and effectiveness of media authority, and journalistic profession, standards and protection. The data show that access to information and freedom of expression in the country are guaranteed by a legal framework. In Latvia, access to information is enshrined in the constitutional laws; the government has accepted international agreements regulating access to information and the right to information. In 2020, a new law on Public Service Media and Its Governance was adopted, which is intended to reduce the political influence on the public media authority. The law entered into force on 1 January 2021.

MPM Market Plurality indicators constitute a high-risk situation (75%) due to increasing news media and online platform concentration, according to MPM2021 data. The highest increase in concentration is in the digital news media field. Although Latvia has a sufficient level of media viability, media regulatory measures do not envisage sufficient concentration restrictions in the small media market (for example, there are no restrictions on horizontal or cross-media concentration). The high risk of market plurality is determined by the commercial and ownership influence on media content, as well as the lack of transparency of media owners. In 2020, when advertising investments decreased during the pandemic, the continued existence of small, independent media companies was endangered. In this group of indicators, only media viability data indicate a medium risk situation. This shows that Latvian media organisations are gradually adapting to market changes and restructuring their revenue structure, offering both new services and products and introducing modified subscription services.

1.1. Main traditions and turns in the 21st century and current situation of the media research and monitoring system

The Mediadelcom data analysis illustrates the development of quality criteria for scientific publications and research in the social sciences, which includes both the peer review process and the status of national publications. In the second stage of this study period, Latvian researchers started to take part in EU level or global research projects. This increases the number of publications and makes more research data available for open access. The strong focus on the rankings of international higher education institutions requires universities to increase the quality requirements for the publications of the academic staff, therefore the number of internationally indexed publications has been increasing since 2016.

The funding structure of journalism and media research provides an opportunity to understand the quality and the spectrum of research problems selected. It shows that at the national level, most of the media studies projects are small-scale research initiatives carried out by individual researchers, as no stable and successive media/journalism/communication research system has been established during the period covered by the Mediadelcom project. A larger number of

publications were available a few times during this period, when researchers received public institutions or international donor funding. Few high-quality research studies on media and journalistic environments have been promoted by comparative projects initiated by the European Commission or other international institutions.

The literature analysis is based on the following information resources: databases of research institutes of Latvian higher education institutions for internal use, database of experts of the Latvian Council of Science, resources of the National Library of Latvia, international academic databases (SAGE Publications, EBSCO, Erich Plus and others).

In the second stage of the period covered by the Mediadelcom project, researchers from Latvian academic institutions have been involved in major EU-level or global projects. However, the lack of research capacity has prevented representatives of Latvian media studies from gaining the status of a leading partner in important research programmes such as Horizon2020, Cost Action and others. This means that there is a lack of data on important issues of deliberative communication at two levels: first, there is no regular data monitoring and data analysis, and secondly, Latvian data cannot be found in comparative studies that provide insight into the regional, EU or global context. This means that the knowledge gap applies both to the time period covered by Mediadelcom and to the topics and issues included in the project.

1.2. Explanations of any other structural peculiarities that may be important for the report

There are some structural peculiarities influencing the research of communication, media, and journalism in Latvia. First, the lack of clear, concentrated focus caused mainly by the small size of the country, its media audience, number of institutions and individuals involved in research and monitoring, small amounts of funding, individual interest led projects and lack of a strategic plan envisioning development of the media system in the country and need for monitoring/research of the field. In addition, the historical background made conceptualising the field of study, research and administration of media complicated. In post-socialist Latvia, the role of the media in democratic society had to first be re-established. After regaining independence in 1991, the study and research environment for communication, media and journalism was also restructured. New actors typical for civic society (public representative bodies, NGOs, new professional associations) were introduced and contributed to the change of focus. During the Soviet period, the only academic unit for the study direction and research of journalism and communication was the Department of Journalism of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Latvia (former Pēteris Stučka State University of Latvia). It was moved to the newly established Faculty of Social Sciences in 2000, where now the research activities in communication are a part of the focus of the Institute for Social and Political Research.

Main bodies of research and media education

Since 2000, the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia has been one of the leading institutions in the field. It only issued research periodicals on the Latvian media research scene – *Daudzveidība* [Diversity] focused on media and democracy, Agora was a collection of research papers of projects, Domino was a publication of student research works. But all these periodicals only had a couple of issues and were not peer reviewed. The longest-running edition focusing on media and communication issues is the peer reviewed Communication Volume of the Acta Universitatis Latviensis, but not all the articles here have issues relevant for the Mediadelcom project. Few relevant research studies (on media-related competences, legal and ethical issues) have been created in other faculties and institutes of the University of Latvia.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there were no doctoral level communication study programmes in Latvia and no doctoral level researchers with a Latvian degree in this specific field –

the first communication science doctors had to defend their theses in other countries and universities. Nevertheless, starting from the last years of the 1990s, study programmes and departments of communication emerged in other universities in Latvia: Riga Stradiņš University, Applied Business university "Turība", Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. This list can be continued by two regional higher education institutions – Liepāja University and Rēzekne Academy of Technologies – where researchers of media and journalism work in several departments of university and for some years journalism/communication study programmes were implemented). The Centre for Media Studies at Stockholm School of Economics in Riga has a more concentrated focus on media business and investigative journalism. Along with universities there are institutions for sociological research or political study (for example, Baltic Institute for Social Sciences) as well as NGOs (for example, Providus or Delna) that have contributed to research on media and journalism in the form of study projects on possible risks for civil society and deliberative communication (e.g., minorities, and social integration, hidden political advertising etc.). The commercial research companies (TNS/KANTAR Latvia, Gemius Latvia, SKDS, Latvijas Fakti etc.) involved in regular surveys of media audiences and public opinion must also be mentioned.

However, even if the number of institutions and persons involved in research on media and journalism may seem significant for a small country like Latvia, the lack of proper and continuous funding did not allow one to cover all areas of the media field and build up a network of expertise centres, each specialising in different areas. The National Network of Science at the Academy of Science that is issuing expert rights of the Latvian Council of Science to the researchers based on their applications, is currently counting 13 experts in the field of media and communication (LZP, 2022).

1.4. Funding system of media research and monitoring (public, private, project-based, etc.)

Rather sporadic research is a result of both short-term grant provision and lack of a proper strategy in organisation and planning in the media research field. The fact that there was never funding for an academic journal for media and communication studies in Latvia, and the publishing opportunities are rather poor, is an important factor influencing both the national and international competitiveness of media scholars of Latvia. Even if some government funded research programmes (VPP – State Research Programme, LZP – Latvian Council of Science Programme) allowed the inclusion of media and journalism study, this field of research virtually "disappears" between humanities and political science/sociology on the landscape of science in Latvia.

The research of media usage patterns is more regular than in other domains. Here, the main players are commercial companies creating data mainly for the commercial interests of media outlets and advertisers (TNS/Kantar, Gemius). However, parts of the quantitative surveys relevant for audience research are performed on a regular basis by both domestic and European statistical data providers and public opinion monitoring bodies (CBS, Eurostat, Eurobarometer). Quantitative research is also performed by commercial companies specialising in national representative surveys (for example, Latvijas Fakti or SKDS) on the basis of contracts with research and monitoring bodies (e.g., universities, ministries etc.) within the framework of particular (differently founded) projects.

Other areas of media and journalism research, especially if the research involves qualitative methodology, are mainly studied on the bases of particular projects funded by EU, Open Society Foundations and several other NGOs, with sporadic support by state institutions (such as, for example, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science, National Electronic Media Board) and universities and with no additional support (by scholars who are part of the aca-

demic staff in universities and higher education institutions). The existing funding system implies a lack of a targeted, regular and well-organised funding for the monitoring and research of all main important domains of communication, media and journalism in the context of deliberative communication and democracy. No areas are sufficiently covered. The gaps in the research scope(s) are based on no or lacking project funding or no (or lack of) researcher personalities, because particular project calls and particular personal research experiences and interests are the main factors having an impact on project-based fund-raising and following that – developing research areas.

1.5. National research database and most important journals

There is no separate academic journal in Latvia dedicated to journalism and media studies, nor is there a regular and high-quality publication focusing on media regulation, media ethics or media policy. Issues of media regulation or freedom of expression are occasionally discussed in the journal "Jurista Vārds" ("Voice of Lawyer"), but this publication, although prepared by high-level experts, is not peer reviewed and does not meet basic academic criteria. Academic research papers on communication, media and journalism are mostly published in university journals for social sciences (or other related sciences – humanities, pedagogy etc.) – Latvijas Universitātes Raksti (Acta Universitatis Latviensis), RSU Zinātniskie raksti (Scientific Papers of RSU), conference collections and in collective or individual monographs. The libraries of universities are collecting articles by associated researchers and there is the National Information System of Scientific Activity containing data on researchers, projects and publications (https://sciencelatvia.lv/#/pub/home). Some of the latest state financed research results are published in the Data Base for Publications and Research Papers (http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/) sustained by the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre of the Republic of Latvia. However, there is a lack of a coordinated system for data collected in the beginning of the century and communication, media and journalism are not very well covered in those data bases, because mostly communication research are about the mass information means in a very general way.

2. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of legal and ethical regulation domain

2.1. Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression (FoE) in the Latvia is guaranteed by a legal framework. The regulation of the Latvian media is liberal; it consists of some basic media laws, the content of which complies with international human rights documents and the transnational agreements signed by Latvia. There are no high legal barriers and thresholds to enter the media market in Latvia.

Access to journalism as a profession in Latvia is free, not limited by educational requirements, and active journalist status does not require registration or licensing. It gives anyone who wants to work in journalism the opportunity to join this profession and increase diversity within journalism practices. However, a lack of education and willingness to adapt to the demands of the commercial media environment leads to breaches of professional ethics and to the development of an instrumental culture of journalism (Dimants, 2018).

Bibliographic data that corresponds to the legal and ethical regulation domain of the Mediadelcom project make up the smallest share of the journalism and media studies research in Latvia over twenty years – 18 percent or 69 publications, the content of which in 113 cases corresponds to one of the domain subcategories (Appendix No. 1, Chart No. 1).

The short list of research shows that the representatives of Latvian legal sciences have little interest in the right to information and communication, and especially a lack of interest in me-

dia regulation and self-regulation is observed. The authors of the selected publications only include four members of the legal profession.

According to bibliographic referencing quantitative data, the highest number of occurrences in this domain (60 cases) is in the Freedom of expression category (FoE): 21 publications refer to the subcategory of media ownership/transparency and all criticise the lack of media ownership transparency in Latvia; in 20 cases the publication corresponds to the subcategory of prominence of audio-visual media services of general interest. In the other subcategories, the number of publications is very small: four of them concern the protection of journalistic sources and the same (4) access to information, 2 publications respectively refer to disinformation and defamation, one to whistle-blower protection, one to copyright protection. Scientific publications on hate speech have not been found. Hate speech is explained for the public on the civic rights website "Human Rights Guide" (Cilvēktiesību Gids, n.d.) as well as in various media publications.

Data and publications on defamation in Latvia are available in separate international databases, the purpose of which is to monitor cases of defamation or to analyse the compliance of Latvian regulations with international standards. As already mentioned, there is a lack of academic research on this issue. For example, several cases of defamation have been recorded in the International Press Institute database (see example here: https://tinyurl.com/4nw6emk3). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) fifth monitoring report on Latvia (the first conducted in 1997) was available during the study period. The report praises the work on the recognition and investigation of hate crimes, the authors of reports admit that integration of refugees and asylum seekers has been carried out, but the report highlights serious shortcomings, pointing to the following (ECRI, 2018): Latvia's criminal, civil and administrative law is not yet fully in line with ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination; despite previous recommendations to this effect the ECRI notes that the State Police does not have a dedicated team tasked with reaching out to vulnerable groups in the context of combatting hate crime. There is also a lack of promotion of counter-speech among high-level political representatives and other public figures in response to racist and homo-/transphobic hate speech. ECRI also notes that the support activities for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (alternative status) are not sufficient, especially in the areas of language training and integration into the labour market. Furthermore, the ECRI is seriously concerned about incidents of alleged discrimination against refugees/persons with alternative status when trying to access health care services.

No academic research on the SLAPP problem in Latvia was found during the research.

2.2. Freedom of information

Similarly to the FoE regulation on the protection of the right to information in Latvia is guaranteed by a legal framework, which generally is in line with international standards. A new regulation has been developed for the adaptation of personal data protection and GDPR in Latvia (White & Case, 13 November 2019); however, there is a lack of academic research on these issues. Educational information on data protection and GDPR is offered to the public by news media and several state institutions, and the in-depth analysis of these issues is provided by the Ombudsman on its website (Tiesībsargs, n.d.).

Trade secret protection in the Baltic states has been analysed to assess the adoption of the Trade Secrets Directive in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia (Birstonas et al., 2019). The authors of the article explain that in Latvia there are at least two laws, which provide the definition of a trade secret. One version is defined by Art. 7 of the Freedom of Information Law, and the Commercial Law defines the status of a commercial secret in relation to the following criteria:

1) "it is contained in the undertaking of the merchant or is directly related to it;

2) it is not generally accessible to third parties;

3) it is of an actual or potential financial or non-financial value;

4) its coming into the disposal of another person may cause losses to the merchant;

5) the merchant has taken reasonable measures to preserve secrecy" (Birstonas et al., 2019, p. 352). To implement the EU Trade Secrets Directive in Latvia the brand new Trade Secret Protection Act was enacted. However, the authors of the study conclude that the Trade Secret Directive has not been properly implemented in Latvia, as section 5 of the Latvian Trade Secret Protection Act "does not strictly distinguish between illegal acquisition on the one hand and illegal use and disclosure on the other" (Birstonas et al., 2019, p. 356), although such a difference can be found in the Directive. According to the authors, such an interpretation may create additional problems in the application of this law.

2.3. Accountability system (codes(s) of ethics; media/press councils; other instruments of media accountability)

Publications discussing the ethics of journalism and relating to the category Normative perspective are found in 35 cases, ten publications mention codes of ethics. There are very few publications in the other categories of this domain: three articles mention other instruments of media accountability, two - media/press councils, one publication covers the media ombudsperson issue.

There are only a few publications in this domain that offer in-depth analysis of media regulation or professional ethics. Among the various issues, more attention is paid to the transparency of media owners, which has been a serious issue in the selected period of the Mediadelcom project, as data on media owners and beneficiaries have not been available in Latvia for a long time. Since the beginning of 2020, data on the current owners of the media are available free of charge in the Lursoft database of the Latvian Company Register.

Due to the interest and research of some of the authors, a relatively larger number of research publications address the ethical issues of media and journalism. The most serious publications in this field have been written by Skaidrīte Lasmane, a senior researcher at the University of Latvia. This author's publications explain current cases interpreted in the context of media and journalistic ethics, as well as communication ethics. Other publications identify the structure of media and self-regulation in Latvia. In several cases, data on the state of media regulation and self-regulation have been used in international comparative data research projects, such as the EU Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019/2020). MPM data show that the first self-regulatory institution of media ethics, the Latvian Media Ethics Council, was established in December of 2018, and it is acting since spring of 2019. Until then, no system for the protection of the interests of the audience has been established in Latvia. The number and content of academic publications on media ethics reflect the absence of self-regulation in legal documents, i.e., professional ethics is not mentioned in the media regulation, it only appears in Article 24 of the Electronic Mass Media Law and is only applied to the requirement to observe generally accepted ethical principles of journalism for news programmes.

Publications compiled in the regulation domain mostly analyse the situation in Latvia; only six out of 63 offer data from other countries. The data show serious research quality problems – only nine publications are indexed in the WoS/Scopus databases, half are open access, 39 publications are peer reviewed. A third (24) of the publications selected in this domain belong to the group of international scientific publications, 32 publications are in English or German. Most of the publications and data refer to the last decade (2011-2020).

The data show that the issues of media and journalism regulation are not sufficiently analysed, there is a lack of serious research and national level data on both of the basic issues (freedom of

expression, protection of journalistic sources, defamation, professional ethics, trade secret protection etc.) and modern problems such as the digitisation and regulation of audio-visual services.

In summary, the regulation of freedom of expression and information accessibility is generally in line with international standards, but additional risks are posed by quality problems and the lack of academic research (and high-quality regulation) on the legal issues of modern public communication and media landscape phenomena.

Experts interviewed agree that research in the legal domain is lacking. Artūrs Kučs, judge of Constitutional Court of Latvia, associated professor at the University of Latvia stresses that only a small number of researchers are interested in the related issues and there are no resources in universities; therefore, students are also not choosing this direction of study. The expert states that this lack of monitoring capacity created a dangerous gap in the context of introduction of new laws and regulations, for example: "More detailed research shall be focused on freedom of expression in relation to amendments in the law that facilitated the closure of Russian internet resources"[238]. He also underlines the lack and urgency of disinformation regulation. Ieva Andersone, attorney-at-law of Sorainen bureau adds to the list of understudied issues "media regulation, self-regulation, disinformation, status of journalists and their protection, journalists' perception of pre-election agitation period sensitivity; alternative media regulation – podcasts etc."[239]

3. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of the journalism domain

In Latvia, three rivalling journalism cultures that can be distinguished by their attitude towards accountability have been defined (Dimants, 2018). First, the ethnic minority media are represented by the traditional Russian journalism culture. Secondly, the instrumental and authoritarian (post-Soviet) journalistic culture characterises the media that are not independent from political and economic subsystems of the society. Thirdly, a professional media culture, orientated towards high professional standards and editorial autonomy from the publisher and owners, can also be identified.

3.1. Market conditions (size and concentration)

Bibliographic data analysis of publications that belong to the journalist domain shows that one fifth (19%, 75) of the papers fall into the Market conditions category (29). These are publications that analyse the relationship between journalism and the media structure, focusing on the study of ownership diversity (18) and local/regional journalism (14). There are very few publications in the other subcategories: 6 refer to the labour market; 4 – foreign interests, 3 – news media interests.

Liberal media regulation has helped to develop a diverse media system characterised by many players in each media segment, oligopolistic competition, and a high level of concentration (Jastramskis et al., 2016). The quality of journalism, its autonomy, and the level of editorial independence in the Latvian media are influenced by the high degree of commercialisation (Rožukalne, 2013); some of the Latvian media operate under direct or indirect political influence, but the political influence is decreasing (Rožukalne, 2020).

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[238] Interview with Artūrs Kučs conducted on 20 September 2022.
[239] Interview with Ieva Andersone conducted 18 on September 2022.

The highest concentration is observed in the newspaper market, the lowest - in the digital media segment. MPM data (MPM, 2018; MPM, 2020) show that the concentration of the internet media news market is increasing. This situation is partially offset by direct state support for the creation of high-quality media through the Media Support Fund (MPM, 2020).

At the beginning of the research period, national owners mainly operated in the Latvian media environment. Some media organisations represented Scandinavian media groups (Modern Time Group, Bonnier AB) that established the principles and standards of Western European media operations in Latvian journalism. From 2008, after the economic recession, when Bonnier AB, the owner of Diena, the largest publishing house in Latvia at the time, left the Latvian market, significant changes took place in the structure of Latvian media owners, with new media owners coming to Latvia under a "neighbour" basis (Salovaara & Juzefovičs, 2012). Within a few years, the owners representing Russia bought several commercial radio channels, but digital media (Apollo.lv and Tvnet.lv) and the national news agency LETA became the property of Estonian media companies (Ekspress Grupp, Eesti Media). The news agency BNS (Baltic News Service), owned by Finnish entrepreneurs, left the Latvian market. At the end of the second period of the study, the share of national media owners in the electronic media segment of the Latvian media market is gradually decreasing, and influential local media owners still control the newspaper and magazine publishing market.

In Latvia, there are no precise data on the impact of global platforms on the advertising market, nor are there any regulatory measures that would restrict competition between global platforms (especially, social networking platforms) in the national media and advertising market.

Media viability situation analysis shows contradicting results (MPM, 2020). The fundamentals of the economic existence of the media are becoming increasingly precarious, but part of media organisations have been able to adapt to changes in their business models in a short period of time and are looking for new forms of income generation both inside and outside the media business. Part of the professional media in Latvia have adapted to the new business models and are more or less successfully struggling for new revenue sources.

The most unstable are the existence of local and regional and local media, mainly newspapers, as even before the COVID-19 crisis their advertising revenues were very low and retail revenues declined. According to Ivonna Plaude, a representative of the Latvian Journalists' Association, without government support, many regional media companies would be forced to close down. Paradoxically, the number of visits and audience of regional media websites increased rapidly during the COVID-19 crisis, but media organisations did not have the resources to monetise the growing audience and increase revenue from regular digital information provision.

The evaluation of commercial and ownership influence over editorial content is one of the most complicated tasks within MPM activities (MPM, 2020). There are some explanations that illustrate the situation in Latvia. Analysis of legal acts shows that there are no mechanisms granting social protection to journalists in the case of changes of ownership or editorial line of media companies in Latvia. The regulatory safeguards, which seek to ensure that decisions regarding appointments and dismissals of editors-in-chief are not influenced by commercial interests do not exist in Latvia. Likewise, there are no regulatory safeguards or self-regulatory measures stipulating the obligation of journalists to not be influenced by commercial interests.

Interviews with editors and journalists of various media organisations (national, local, print, TV and radio, online) identify that media owners' commercial interests are the main factor that limits editorial independence and causes self-censorship. Nevertheless, there are few media firms that build their business activities in collaboration with political parties or politically influential individuals. Research project (Rožukalne, 2020) on internal and external sources of self-censorship in various media (national/local, commercial/public) organisations identifies that in many editorial offices, the interests of advertisers were named as the dominant external

factor encouraging self-censorship. This is followed by political pressure; almost half of the journalists (49%) felt that they had to take into account the interests of their business owners and the political allies of the latter. When comparing political and economic pressure, the political influence was mostly described as 'moderate' and "subtle', whereas the demand to serve economic interests was defined as 'powerful' or 'routinised'.

Journalists accept the dual character of their professional activities as inevitable. Serving certain political interests is not merely a reaction to external factors in the media environment but is the essence of these media companies. In fact, journalists consider themselves to be responsible for contributing to their medium's profit goals. Media firms merge the existing editorial values with collaboration, adaptation, and business thinking. They regard the merger of editorial and commercial departments as undesirable, yet as an inevitable part of professional practice in Latvia. The limitations of professional autonomy are compensated for by the possibility of defending the medium's economic sustainability.

Self-censorship no longer only means the exclusion or reduction of professional values, but rather their dispersal and displacement. Thus, while maintaining a clear understanding of the principles necessary for the existence of the profession, journalists either deliberately or unwittingly adapt their daily practices to meet the expectations of their media owners.

The number of media outlets is slowly decreasing in 2020. One of the national dailies Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze (Independent Morning Paper) ceased to be a paper edition, becoming only a digital edition. The largest national daily Latvijas Avīze (Latvian Newspaper) sold its digital medium la.lv to the commercial television company RigaTV24. The regional newspaper (Kursas Laiks (Kursa Time) was merged with its competitor Kurzemes Vārds (Voice of Kurzemes) in Kurzeme region (Western part) in Latvia. The TV channel LNT and its news department have been closed at the end of 2019; now there is only one commercial TV news service in Latvia (TV3 news service).

3.2. Public service media

The other subcategories in the journalism domain form one-sixth of the total bibliographic reference analysis. 14% or 54 publications are devoted to the analysis of the situation of public media journalists, 10 discuss the autonomy of public media, 8 cover PSM funding issues.

The situation of Latvian public media within the research period is characterised by similar problems: public media funding is insufficient; it is one of the lowest in the European Union. The supervision of Latvian public media is combined with the general regulation of the electronic media structure, which means that the functions of the regulator of the media and the supervisor of public service media is performed by one institution, the National Electronic Media Council (NEEMC). The selection process of its members and its activities have been associated with political influence on PSM (Beitika, 2016). The difficulties in the existence and independence of PSM do not directly reflect public perceptions. Latvian PSM maintains a high level of audience trust.

The level of trust in Latvian PSM, i.e., Latvian Television (LTV), Latvian Radio (LR) and LSM.LV, has been studied in a fragmented manner. According to the public remit test, the trust index is 72% for LTV and 82% for LR. This increased slightly for LTV between 2014 and 2016. The difference in the trust level of those who watch LTV at least once a week compared to those who do not is rather startling – 72% and 35%, respectively. The trustworthiness of LTV among respondents who watch television at least once a week has increased slightly (from 69% in 2014 to 71% in 2016). The level of trust by those who do not watch LTV is much lower: 37%-40%.

In 2018, 63% of the LTV target audience trusts public television, a decrease of 67% since 2016. In 2018, 72% of the respondents who watch LTV at least once a week trust public television. Among those who do not watch LTV at least once a week, 44% trust the channel.

In Latvia, younger media users (under the age of 35) consume public media less frequently. The losses among the younger audience are caused by the lack of sufficient youth-orientated content on PSM. Since 2016, trust has decreased slightly. There is less trust among those aged under 45, students, respondents with average incomes and those who rarely consume media, especially TV news (LTV/Civitta 2018). Trust and satisfaction with LTV remain stable and have even improved among audiences with lower education, who prefer relatively light media content, as well as those aged 25-34. Trust has decreased among those who tend to rely on LTV, are interested in more complex topics, and are better educated.

The level of trust in Latvian PSM has been continuously high. The viewership of LTV and listenership of LR continues to decrease slightly (1-4% per year), but 80% of the population consume PSM and the popularity of the LSM.LV digital platform is increasing (LF 2020).

As with media generally, the trust in PSM is also highly impacted by the differences in the attitudes of various ethnic groups. There are obvious differences in the trust evaluations of Latvian speakers and non-Latvian speakers regarding LTV. Among Latvian speakers 70% trust LTV, whereas a mere 35% of non-Latvian speakers do.

The situation has changed a great deal in five years. Data from 2020 (LF, 2020) shows that 90% of Latvian speakers and 63% of non-Latvian speakers consume Latvian PSM. To a large extent, the respondents who consume PSM content trust it. 88% of Latvian speakers and 81% of non-Latvian speakers trust Latvian Television, 85% of Latvians and 77% of non-Latvian speakers trust Latvian Radio, and 80% of Latvians and 63% of non-Latvian speakers trust LSM.LV.

Other research data (Juzefovičs, 2019) compare the respondents' trust in Latvian-language PSM stations (LTV1 and LR1) and Russian-language ones (LTV7 and LR4) (2019) based on 2008 data. The level of trust in LTV1, which was 77% in 2008, dropped to 63% by 2019. Although LTV7 provides information in Russian and its viewership in 2019 was three times smaller than for LTV1 (LTV 9.6%, LTV7 2.8%) (Kantar 2019), both stations have similar trust levels. This could be related to the fact that LTV7 only provides specific programming in Russian (news, discussions), whereas the rest is comprised of educational documentaries, series, sport broadcasts in Latvian.

The trust level for the Latvian radio station LR1 dropped by more than 10% but remains much higher than that of the Russian language radio channel LR4 (as of 2019, 50% and 35% respectively).

Latvia's media policy is characterised by long-term indecisiveness about whether to increase the Russian-language content in Russian of Latvian PSM (LR Saeima 2018). This could be one of the reasons why PSM has been unsuccessful in addressing Russian-speaking Latvians (Juzefovičs, 2019).

Although the data is fragmented and not always comparable, we can conclude that Latvian society's confidence in public media institutions is stable. The level of trust is related to two indicators – media use in general and the familiarity of the audience with the content of a specific medium or channel.

In summary, Latvian PSM has failed to attract two significant audience segments – young people and Russian-speakers. However, the small percentage of Russian viewers and listeners could result from political decisions that have prevented the production of more Russian-language content. Interestingly, recent data suggest that the LSM.LV news site, which offers content in Latvian, Russian and English, could change the attitudes of various generations and ethnic groups towards PSM. All the generations agree that PSM helps to strengthen democracy in Lat-

via and promotes the development of Latvian culture (Juzefovičs, 2019). However, there are strong differences in the assessment of these factors among the various ethnic groups. Russian speakers have less faith in the potential of the PSM as a democracy-reinforcing institution (73% Latvians, but only 47% Russian speakers, believe so). However, regardless of ethnicity, the population unanimously believes that PSM plays an important role in strengthening and advancing Latvian culture (88% of Latvian speakers and 70% of Russian speakers agree).

3.3. Production conditions

The production issues of journalism work are covered in 12% or 45 publications, of which 35 talk about production conditions, 4 about digitalisation, 3 about investigative resources, and 3 about foreign offices.

The commercialisation of the media environment influences the practice of journalism. Although individual cases point to the influence of political interests on media content, Latvian journalists recognise that their work and professional values are to a greater extent determined by the commercial interests of media organisations (Rožukalne, 2020). Keeping the business interests of media companies in mind means combining professional journalistic values with collaboration and adaptation to the requirements of not only creating professional content but also taking responsibility for media firms' business results. Thus, journalistic practice is influenced by the commercial interests of individuals and organisations. This increases the level of self-censorship and conformism (Schimpfössl et al., 2020; Rožukalne, 2020) in Latvian journalism.

Ilze Šulmane, representing the Faculty of Social Sciences of University of Latvia, is a researcher who has conducted the only longitudinal study dedicated to the culture of Latvian journalism. She is interested in the roles of the values of journalists, and professional identities of journalists since the 20th century; 90 years (Šulmane, 2012). Ilze Šulmane also focuses on the differences between the approaches of journalism in the Latvian and Russian language press (2007).

After 2000, several more researchers turned to journalism. Sergejs Kruks is mostly interested in the sociology of journalism, stereotypes in media while Ainārs Dimants conducts research on censorship and self-censorship in newspaper editorials. During this period, part of the research on journalism is initiated and funded by the Open Society Foundation in Latvia and the National Electronic Media Council (public service media news quality reports) (Kruks et al., 2007).

At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the largest part of research on journalism is carried out at the Department of Communication Studies of Riga Stradins University. Part of these studies fall into the category of research reports; they are not indexed.

From 2010, Latvian researchers are involved in international research, such as the Worlds of Journalism Study and Media Digital Mapping, which collect data on the state of journalism. Since 2015, data on Latvian journalism are compiled in the EU Media Pluralism monitor database. During more than ten years since doctoral studies programmes in communication sciences have been available in Latvia (from 2006), there are still less than ten doctoral dissertations defended, and only a few cover journalism and media issues.

Given the lack of resources for media and journalism research a few projects should be noted, the results of which led to an increase in scientific publications.

In 2006, Inta Brikše as the editor published the book "Information Environment in Latvia: beginning of the 21st century", which analyses various aspects of the change in the information environment and the interaction of media, politics, state, law, politics, religion, art. This is the only book published in the first phase of our research period that comprehensively assesses trends in the communication and information environment, highlighting the links between media and political culture.

The publication of this book affects Mediadelcom overall publication data, showing a significant increase in the number of publications in 2006. The book is supported by the Chancellery of the President of Latvia.

The second book, which describes the Latvian journalism and media field is a collection of research papers "Diversity of the Latvian media environment", edited by Vita Zelče (2018). The research projects in it and the book itself came out thanks to the support of the project of the Media Policy Unit of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia.

3.4. Working conditions

According to data of the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) research (Ozolina, 2016), journalists of Latvia are nearly unanimous in the opinion that they act as detached observers. Altogether, journalists are confident of the importance of professional ethics. However, a fraction of WJS data shows the presence of double standards. Nearly half of the interviewed journalists claim that ethical decisions depend on personal evaluation, whereas a third agree that they could disregard moral standards if extraordinary circumstances required it (Ozolina, 2016). These data refer to conclusions made by Ilze Šulmane (2012), who elaborated a longitudinal research project and concluded that the professional identity of journalists is unclear and lacking a shared universal set of professional values. Instead, the journalists in Latvia are used to adapting to the political logic of media owners, as opposed to professional logic.

The journalism domain contains information on 164 publications that are in some way related to the categories of analysis defined in the Mediadelcom study. Significantly, a small proportion of research is devoted exclusively to the study of journalism, and journalism and media studies in this domain usually address other issues, such as media system or media structure.

Publications in the field of journalism domain (Annex No 1., Chart No. 2) are mainly concerned with journalistic competences (43%, 164 publications). This category summarises media content research conducted using qualitative and quantitative content analysis, as well as some projects surveying journalists' self-perceptions of professional roles and values.

In this category, most publications (44) include a discussion of the discrepancy between normative ideals and the practice of journalism values (31), journalism competencies (28) and skills and practices (24). There are far fewer publications on journalistic knowledge and ability (9), or journalistic roles (3).

12% or 48 publications analyse the working environment of journalists: 30 are related to the working condition, 12 publications are a clear manifestation of commercialisation, 3 publications are devoted to employment condition and satisfaction; 2 publications are about education and training.

Almost half (72) of the publications in the domain of journalism are published in foreign languages (English, German, French, Russian), and a third (51) are published internationally. Most or 96 out of 164 publications have been peer reviewed, and half of the publications (80) are open access. Only 14 publications (7%) are indexed in WoS/Scopus databases, showing serious quality issues, and describing limited international research opportunities.

The publications in the field of journalism in most cases cover many issues on the Mediadelcom category list. This means that there are a few in-depth and focused research studies in this section of the project, thus, the situation of journalism in Latvia is mostly analysed superficially and descriptively.

There are several gaps; the main ones according to one of the experts Ainārs Dimants include "lack of both research on media effects using a longitudinal studies approach and the combination of research methods, as well as in-depth research on communicators, for example, on media

usage of the journalistic environment and to what extent in the selection of news, journalists are led by abstract (idealistic) values and beliefs. The last-mentioned problem especially relates to the research of the media agenda and the situation of press freedom".[240]

4. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of media usage patterns

Media usage and audience research has been one of the relatively popular research directions in Latvia during the first 2 decades of the 21st century - 149 of the publications selected for analysis here were related to the domain of Media Usage Patterns. A significant part of media usage studies originated for commercial purposes, and there are two main directions of data gathering – opinion polls and uses of media. For quantitative research there are datasets on media usage and audience preferences available from both commercial and non-commercial providers, collected with relative regularity on both the national (CSB, 2020; Latvijas Fakti, 2017; 2018; TNS/Kantar 1991-2020; Gemius, 1999-2020) and international comparative (Eurobarometer, Eurostat) level that are used for commercial and academic research. More focused quantitative data are collected by social research companies such as SKDS in Omnibus surveys and used for academic research projects (for example, Rožukalne & Skulte, 2016; Rožukalne et. al, 2020). Qualitative research is more irregular, carried out almost exclusively by individual academic and – to lesser extent – non-academic (NGO based) researchers and research groups, and therefore depends on the interests of researchers or goals of particular projects. In-depth analysis is often lacking. Longitudinal research approaches using media usage data sets available for longer periods of time for analysis, are rare. Most of the publications are open access.

Due to the mostly short-term and fragmented research on media audiences, not all areas that are interesting in the context of the Mediadelcom study are evenly covered in the corpus of research articles.

52% (95 of all 181 items analysed) contained one or several elements listed as indicators characterising the media usage conditions and structure, whereas 48% (or 86) were partly of only (13%, 23 from 181) devoted to the analysis of media users' preferences. However, because of the lower described reasons (in particular, interest in research community about minority issues in media usage) some research areas from the media usage conditions and structure field are more developed then all the others – the biggest number of articles analyse access to media and diversity in the media system – 72 out of 181, followed by functionalities of media (55). The access to media and channel preferences (44) and quality of news media (37) follows in this list (See Annex, Chart 3).

Less, but certainly some researchers described the relevance of public service media (28), relevance of news media (25) and only some studies touch the subject of trust in media (6), one of them being Eurobarometer public opinion research on a regular basis. This analysis show that the choice of topics, goals and objectives of the research was strongly influenced not only by personal interests of researchers, but also by funding available for the study of democratic structures of society and independent media in the service of citizens and commercial interest for the usage of media in the context of a developing market. In-depth analysis including trust in media and relevance of news media, as well as role of public service media, is strongly needed.

The majority of those publications are published in Latvia (152); however, a lesser part is in Latvian (88). Only a small part takes the context of several countries into account (26) and only some (20) are referred in collections of WoS, Scopus or similar (meaning consequently a small

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[240] Interview with Ainārs Dimants, conducted 21.09.22.

international impact). Similarly, a small number of studies take a longitudinal approach (34). Most of the articles describe the contemporary situation in media usage. However, there has also been some interesting and important work in the history of Latvian journalism and media audiences (Zelče, 2009; Chakars, 2010). For analysis of political aspects of media usage, the work of O. Skudra (2018a, 2018b) is important, as well as I. Brikše's and A. Dimants' work on public service media and developing the journalism and media field after the 1990s.

4.1. Research and monitoring that reflects access to the media and diversity of viewpoints in the media system

Even if media access, usage preferences and diversity of viewpoints in the media system is a topic emergent in various research sources throughout the period in question, only a small part of these studies mainly focus on media usage; the majority treat it as an additional aspect in, for example, studies on media and journalism or on the role of mass media in political discourse or social integration. The main research topics that included media usage research have been a matter of change ranging from negative stereotypes of the Russian ethnic group in Latvia to the role of public service media and media system as such, while the audience divided by a linguistic and ethnic aspect has been one of the biggest problems driving interest by researchers.

This is especially important in the early period from 2000 to 2013. Researchers such as I. Šulmane and S. Kruks (Kruks, 2001; Šulmane, & Kruks, 2006, Šulmane, 2012) have written several articles on the (ethnic) diversity and risks of rising intolerance. However, the topic gained great interest again when in 2014, the outburst of the problem of Russia's propaganda on TV channels viewed by wide audiences in Latvia, created both public and expert discussion on minority media usage patterns followed by some publications. The beginning of the 2010s is characterised by attempts to grasp media usage issues more in terms of their complexity, especially, thanks to individual researchers such as, for example, Anda Rožukalne who has published several articles, a dissertation and books on different aspects of the audience and media system (Rožukalne, 2010, 2013) and the collective work of researchers from the University of Latvia that allowed a multi-faceted insight into media system, content and access, as well as audience choices and usage patterns (resulting in publications such as "The diversity of media environment in Latvia" (Zelče, 2018).

The first decade of the 21st century was important for the development of Latvian media research because it was characterised by the first doctors in the field – several researchers completed and defended their dissertations on Latvian media in universities outside Latvia (Dimants, 2003, Dupuis, 2000, Kruks, 2003) as well as in Latvia (Rožukalne, 2010), followed in the second decade by other researchers' work whose insight in particular topics resulted in a number of defended doctoral dissertations in both – local universities (University of Latvia and Riga Stradins university) and abroad – and number of related articles. Among them was I. Beitika (2015), with her work on PSM, J. Juzefovičs (2014), with his work on Russian speaking audience, J. Buholcs (2013), with analysis of developing the blogosphere and R. Šmite (2011), with her autoethnographic analysis of creative online communities. Perhaps the most important and most relevant researcher for media usage and audience research in this line is A. Rožukalne, who has written her theses using a mainly qualitative approach, seeking to understand the uses of magazines (most used printed media by Latvian speaking Latvians) by the audience in the context of editorial understanding of their audience. A. Rožukalne has published extensively on this, and a number of other issues related to audience analysis and journalism, as well as social media; she is also a researcher involved in the international study of media pluralism, responsible for the country report of Latvia from 2015 (Media Pluralism Monitor. Latvia. CMPF, 2016, 2017 etc.) It is interesting to note that in the last decade the Latvian media audience outside Latvia has also become a matter for study in, for example, L. Sūna's doctoral thesis (Sūna, 2013).

4.2. Relevance of news media

Research on the relevance of news media is not very well developed in Latvia. It was only discussed in 25 of all sources selected for bibliographical analysis. Typically, this indicator is regarded as important in the analysis of Latvian society in the sources describing media in Latvia in the context of developing democracy. So, in the first decade of the 21st century, the two editions of "How democratic is Latvia? Monitoring of democracy" by the collective of authors from the University of Latvia (Rozenvalds, 2005, 2007) take into account the relevance of news media. It is respected as an important factor in several articles in the collective monographs describing the status quo of the media landscape in Latvia (Brikše, 2006; Zelče, 2018) as well as Latvian parts of international comparative studies (Šulmane, 2007, Rožukalne, 2017; 2018). At the beginning of the 2000s, the relevance of the news media was discussed in the research on media diversity (Kruks, 2001a, 2001b, Šulmane, Kruks, 2002) and especially in articles devoted to the understanding of uses of media, social integration and political orientation or the Russian speaking minority (Šulmane, Kruks); this research later continued in the work of Jānis Juzefovičs (Juzefovičs, 2012, 2013, 2017, Juzefovičs, Kaprāns, 2019). The last mentioned works by authors such as Ilze Šulmane, Sergejs Kruks and Jānis Juzefovičs also form a tradition to involve the aspect of relevance of news in the context of the research of journalism and journalistic content (See Section 3).

The relevance and importance of news media is also discussed in the historical research on Latvian media and journalism. (Chakars, 2010, Zelče, 2009).

4.3. Trust in media

Only a small number of sources from all those analysed took into account indicators regarding trust in media. Data are available from Eurobarometer (EC, 2021); however, data for trust in media were mostly used when characterising the media audience or particular part of the media audience (Russian minority) in Latvia from a certain point of view such as, for example, formation of their political priorities and sympathies (Bērziņa, 2018). In several articles by researcher Jānis Juzefovičs (Juzefovičs, 2012, 2013, 2017; Vihalemm, Juzefovičs, Lepik, 2019, Juzefovičs, Vihalemm, 2020) trust in media in general or, in particular, news or public service media is taken into account as one of the indicators, including comparative Latvian – Estonian research of media users from the Russian speaking minority and other comparative projects (Tejkalová et al., 2018). One can see growing interest in using trust in media data for their analysis and conclusions among Baltic researchers in the end, and after the time frame of research included in this research (Juzefovičs, Vihalemm, 2022, Jõesaar, Rožukalne, Jastramskis, 2022).

In general, all experts agree with the conclusions that the media environment in Latvia has been studied in a fragmented manner, that there is a lack of comparative studies and continuity of research. This is evidenced by the fact that some of the existing studies are not of high quality, and important issues regarding media development have not been studied. For example, Līga Ozoliņa, (university lecturer, Latvian editor of EJO and Worlds of Journalism researcher for Latvia) underlined that recent trends (after the period of time included in the Mediadelcom research) were showing a growing number (also comparative) of research studies on trust and media usage and a larger number of institutions were involved.[241]

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[241] Interview with Līga Ozoliņa, conducted 13.10. 2022.

5. Publications, data sources and main monitoring actors of the media-related competencies domain

Bibliographic data for the media-related competencies domain comprise 26% (84) of all publications (316) selected for the Mediadelcom project in the case of Latvia. The most common category in bibliographic data in this domain (97 cases) is users' cognitive abilities, which is found in 47 publications, 15 publications are related to the subcategory critical consideration of information and 25 publications are related to the subcategory digital skills and literacy. The second most common category (49 cases) is the social context of media-related competencies in 24 publications. The third most common category (45 cases) is users' skills, which is found in 13 publications and respectively 9 publications are related to the subcategory use of media and media technology. A very small number of publications (2 cases) have the category users' ethical capabilities. The category users' communication competencies (12 cases) is also registered in only 5 publications.

Researchers (29 publications) point out that the scientific articles in Latvia as well as the strategic and visionary documents for national development and education policy (2000-2010) display a wide-ranging terminological and conceptual disagreement about media literacy (Biezā, 2020; Stakle, 2011; Daniela, et al., 2018; Brikše et al., 2014; Rubene et al, 2008). This political and conceptual discrepancy has led to the fact that media literacy was only clearly defined as a mandatory part of digital literacy in Latvia's basic and secondary education standards in 2020.

Academic research on media literacy is mostly initiated by the University of Latvia, and the Ministry of Culture of Latvia, and often the subject of research is based on the subjective interests of researchers. It should also be noted that most studies with representative data on media literacy in Latvia were only conducted after 2010. The comparative data on media literacy are also mainly available from the last decade (The European Commission, 2014; UNESCO Medijpratības katedra, 2017; Latvijas Fakti, 2017; Eurostat, 2020a; OECD, 2021). Dita Rietuma, Dr.art., Director of the National Film Centre of Latvia, expert of the Latvian Council of Science in Humanities and Art Sciences agrees with this conclusion: "These studies have a fragmented nature, excluding the audiovisual field, film literacy, which is an essential part of media literacy". She notes that the further list of academic institutions involved in media literacy activities includes higher education places where film and new media are studied: "Communication and audio-visual communication can also be studied in universities under the control of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia – the Latvian Academy of Culture; visual communication can also be studied at the Latvian Academy of Arts. Cinema-related professions can also be learnt at the private secondary school RISEBA"[242]

5.1. Normative sources

The first academic studies in Latvia arguing for the introduction of media literacy into the Latvian education system have only come about in the last twenty years. The Latvian education system in the context of media literacy is in a special situation. Formally, Latvia is bound by the priorities of the leading political institutions of the EU in the field of media literacy and, accordingly, by media literacy education development strategies for the nearest and more distant future. However, the relatively undecided and chaotic education policy has not created a sufficiently open environment for pedagogical ideas that would fully incorporate the content of media literacy into basic, secondary, and adult education (Krumina & Paršova, 2011; Freibergs, 2016; Stakle, 2011; Rožukalne et al., 2020).

[242] Interview with Dita Rietuma, conducted 13.10.22.

Researchers of media literacy focus on a broad range of topics. Z. Rubene, A. Krumiņa and I. Vanaga (2008) argue that nowadays the acquisition of media education in Latvia should take place both by including media literacy as a separate study course of the curriculum and by integrating it into the content of other study courses. When using various media in the education process, it is vital to introduce appropriate methodologies for the acquisition of media literacy (13 publications), which in turn contributes to changes in the curriculum, in the design of the study process, the evaluation of study achievements, the setting of the study environment and the objectives of studies (Rubene et al., 2008; Daniela et al., 2018). These changes also affect the process of student-teacher interaction (8 publications), which is no longer merely a teacher-led study process but, by including study forms such as group work, simulations, and problem-based approaches, promotes the co-responsibility of students in the management of the study process (Rubene et al., 2018; Biezā, 2020). Media messages in research studies are based on cultural texts (books, social experiences, music, various human and/or ecological environments, films, games, social media, etc.) and cultural narratives (broad social discourse on ethnic, gender, historical, religious, and other aspects).

At all levels of education, learning and creation of cultural texts is one of the ways in which an individual forms his or her identity and demonstrates it in the social environment. When using a media message, it is important to understand the approaches used by an individual for interpreting a media message to achieve personal study objectives and reflection. The discovery of the reciprocal ways that media messages are linked with cultural texts and narratives is grounds for a reflection and research-based study process. Researchers underscore (22 publications) the relationship between media and media messages and the individual's mental and emotional cognitive processes, which have a direct impact on the individual's thinking, behaviour, attitude formation, understanding of values, the configuration of meaning structures and critical thinking (Rubene et. al., 2018; Rubene et al., 2008; Davidsone & Silkane, 2019; Brikše & Spurava, 2014; Alina, 2018; Mirķe et al., 2019). It is also emphasised that media literacy ought to be incorporated into all study courses (Rubene, et al., 2008; Stakle, 2011).

Concerning the inclusion of media literacy in the learning process, the researchers particularly highlight (4 publications) the language study courses since they involve working with different texts that are nowadays often interpreted in other media narratives (animation, radio plays, films, and television shows, etc.). During the learning process, by simultaneously using written texts and their interpretations in other media, it is possible to promote the understanding of the language of audio-visual signs, of copyright and censorship and the development of research skills (Rubene & Svece, 2018; Spurava, 2018; Stakle & Belousa, 2007). The social science study courses are another set of study courses that allow for the effective incorporation of media literacy into the learning process (Rubene et al., 2008).

The studies (5 publications) highlight the constructed nature of media messages and their connection with institutions representing a variety of cultural, political, institutional, economic, social, and historical contexts. The target audience of a media message is also grounded in various contexts (often different from the creator of the media message). Mutual understanding of meaning and power relationships in the media and media message environment, based on consensus and coherence, are important principles of action and learning, both for the creator of a media message and for its target audience (Stakle, 2011). The link (15 publications) between media messages and the information on policy, culture, economics, and history is emphasised. By integrating media literacy into the study process, it is possible to encourage learners to discern propaganda and disinformation (7 publications), to distinguish valid and invalid information, to expose prejudices and discern facts from opinions (Rožukalne et al., 2020; Spurava, 2018). The interpretation of a media message (17 publications) is always based on both the individual's experience and the environmental contexts (economic, political, social, historical, etc.) in which the media report has been produced and/or deciphered. Media are part of a social

process, which always emphasises social and economic structures as grounds for any media production activities. The studies (8 publications) highlight popular culture as closely linked to the acquisition of media competence. Media messages relate to the construction of an individual's identity, which is a social and communication-based process. Media messages are an essential source for learning the attribution of meaning to images, cultural concepts, and the technological and idealistic discourses of constructing media messages (Freibergs, 2016; Spurava, 2018; Stakle, 2008).

5.2. Assessment of media related competencies among citizens (e.g., research tests, research, monitoring reports)

Comparative research on media literacy levels has been a relatively recent practice in Latvia since 2016, which does not allow one to draw qualitative conclusions about the development and main trends of the media competence level in society. Since 2016, the Plan for Implementation of the Mass Media Policy Guidelines of Latvia 2016-2020 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016), has been developed, with specific activities focused on comparable and regular studies of the level of media literacy (Latvijas Fakti, 2017; Latvijas Fakti, 2020), establishing of the UNESCO Chair on Media and Information and improving the understanding of media literacy across different social groups, including mentors, librarians, youth and children, specialists in youth affairs of local governments. According to the report of the project "Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU-28" (Freibergs, 2016), the 20 major projects in Latvia focusing on the development of media competences since 2010 were mainly related to research (9 projects) and end user engagement (4 projects). The projects mainly focused on strengthening the awareness of issues such as critical thinking and media usage, audio visual content creation, online security risks and the functioning of the media industry across different audiences (professionals – 4 projects, adolescents and students – 2 projects, children – 2 projects, seniors – 1 project, parents – 1 project and society as a whole – 2 projects).

6. Analysis of research and monitoring capabilities and quality

The analysis of research and monitoring of the domains relevant for understanding the risks and opportunities for the development of deliberative communication in Latvia showed that there is a big difference between several research areas among four domains and between them. The most underdeveloped, with the smallest available number of sources and mostly uneven sharing of publications between more popular areas (freedom of expression and normative issues) and less popular areas (connected to media accountability and ethics), is the domain of legal and ethical issues. Research on journalism is more popular; however, only one area of it is highly developed – journalism skills and competences, whereas the areas of production conditions, working conditions and public service media conditions are discussed in the research more than 3 times less than the first area. The domain of media usage is dominated by research of access possibilities, diversity and channel preferences, while areas highly important for the deliberative communication and democracy of relevance of news media and trust in media are relatively underdeveloped (and mostly developed in research on the Russian speaking minority media usage patterns). Similarly, in the domain of media-related competences, the leading position is taken by research on cognitive abilities and critical approaches to information; at the same time audience members' usage of media technology, communication and ethical aspects of competences are discussed in a small number of publications. Thus, there are gaps in media and communication research in Latvia, when speaking about deliberative communication in the last 20 years. First of all, the data from the research on legal and ethical issues are lacking, especial-

ly, when focusing on media accountability issues. Secondly, more interest about the skills and competences of journalists is expressed in research than the conditions of their work, production of content and other conditional aspects of the journalism field. Thirdly, there is more concentration on uses, access to media, diversity and preferences of the audience, while data on the relevance of news and trust to media are lacking. Fourthly, the skills of communication, using media and practising ethical communication are underestimated by media-related competencies research in favour of cognitive abilities and critical evaluation skills. It is important to underline the knowledge gap in the crossing field of ethical aspects of all the domains analysed.

6.1. Comparative analytical overview of other sources and access to these sources

In Latvian situations, there is no equal access to all data sources in all four domains analysed. There was no system of data gathering and storing and no overall strategy of research development on a national level, and, thus, no easily accessible overview of financing, grants and court cases. To the end of the period of time included in this research situation changed with universities caring about their ratings (and giving access to the research results of projects and success of their academic staff), financers and grant givers requiring dissemination on project websites (or organisational websites or research bodies) and several data bases organised that also include data relevant here. However, even if the data are openly accessible the bad coordination between involved bodies and lack of overall administration strategy does not allow the existing research to have the full impact to be able to develop the professional field and policy. The easiest accessibility is in the domain of media usage with an opinion pool and social and media research companies providing general data on media usage and the attitude towards media, and in some international comparative studies, Latvian researchers participate and provide support in terms of methodology, cross-national comparability of data and the platform for the delivery of data and research conclusions.

6.2. Monitoring capabilities and the quality of data and knowledge

The analysis of quality criteria of bibliographic data confirms the eclectic structure of media studies and journalistic research, as well as identifies serious quality problems.

Data availability and quality are average, but the quality of media studies and communication research is rather low. First, 93% of publications (296 out of 317) are not referenced in WoS or SCOPUS databases. Part of the research papers are mentioned in the other reference sources, mostly in national databases, but due to the unavailability of precise data this cannot be verified at the time of writing this paper.

Secondly, 43% of the publications are not peer reviewed; thus, publications do not meet or partially qualify for the basic criteria of modern scientific publications. A significantly larger part of the high-quality publications that are internationally referenced relate to the second phase of our study from 2010, but most to the recent period, from 2016 to 2020. Thirdly, a large proportion of publications, or 40%, are not available on an open-source basis.

These observations allow one to evaluate trust and reliability level of publications analysed as rather variable – due to a relatively large part of sources not being peer-reviewed or matching the criteria of open science, but also because of conditions and the use of methods in data gathering.

Regarding the complexity of data-gathering, this study showed typical scholarly attitudes. Almost half of the research publications (45%) used mixed methods. Usage of mixed methods refers to two groups of academic publications: media content research employing quantitative and qualitative content analysis, or case analysis, if the media structure or audience structure is

analysed. Quantitative data collection methods (20% of all publications) are mostly used in audience media use studies. Most of this research group is based on secondary data collected regularly by commercial research companies that analyse media consumption habits for media organisations, as this data is needed to attract advertiser investment. Qualitative data collection methods (17%) have been used in media content research using discourse, narrative or framing analysis, as well as in audience and journalism research using the semi-structured qualitative interview method.

Regarding the availability of experts, the analysis of the structure of the authors of the articles complements the data, which shows that the field of media studies and communication in Latvia has not been properly researched. 177 authors are associated with one of the 317 identified bibliographic items. The focus on media or communication research is relatively random, as 133 (75%) of the authors have prepared or co-authored only one publication, and 31 authors created 2-4 articles. 45 (25%) of the authors recorded in the bibliographic data qualify as international authors. However, at the international level, Latvian media and communication processes have not aroused serious interest, as international authors are associated with only 14 (4%) of all publications.

Twelve authors were identified in the bibliographic data, who created 51% (170) of all publications identified in the bibliographic data (each of them published between 7 and 33 articles) between 2000 and 2020; the remaining 49% of the publications were created by 164 authors.

Analysis of the structure of publications over a period of twenty years shows insufficient data continuity and recency. Almost half of all publications (47%) have been published in the last five years (2016-2020), 64% – in the last ten years (2011-2020). Between 2000 and 2005, 19% of all publications in the bibliographic database were published, and 17% were published between 2006 and 2010. These numbers can be explained by the increasing availability of funding from both national and European science support programmes and developing doctoral study postdoctoral projects in communication studies. However, project-based research opportunities are also responsible for the unbalanced development of research in the field, as every project has a narrow focus, leaving gaps of knowledge open and the generalisation of conclusions impossible.

The biggest problem for the continuity of data was and is the lack of nationally based communication research journals. There is no space for continuous discussion on communication, media and journalism and no available data source allowing access to Latvian research for foreign researchers interested in Latvian experience – outcomes that further on damage the successful integration and networking of Latvian researchers in the international communication research area.

7. Conclusions

The analysis of bibliographic data on media and communication environment research in Latvia in the period from 2000-2020 allows one to make the following main conclusions on various analysed aspects:

On the state of media studies and communication research in Latvia. Higher education in media studies in Latvia is available in seven higher education institutions, and two other institutions offer training programmes in journalism. Unfortunately, no separate data are available on the state of communication research, but the overall data on research and development (R&D) in Latvia show that R&D investments depend to a large extent on EFSI (European Fund for Strategic Investments) funding. For instance, in 2018, EFSI funding provided a 35% increase in R&D funding compared to 2017. Latvia's total expenditure on R&D in 2020 represented 0.64% of GDP, which is one of the lowest in the EU (average level is 2.3% of GDP). Latvia also has one of

the lowest figures in the share of science employees from the total national labour force (0.62%) compared to the average of the EU member states – 1.39%. In addition, the average workload per science employee is 0.5. Latvia has both low total R&D investments overall and their amount per one science personnel member (in terms of the FTE), representing 29% of the EU average (Eurostat 2020b; Latvijas nacionālā reformu programma Eiropa, 2020).

On the quantity of studies and publications. The data collected in the study and the number of publications (317) (on average 10 publications per year from 2000-2010, on average 20 publications per year from 2011-2020) show that the field of research on communication is underdeveloped in Latvia. As research in journalism and media are underfunded, a higher number of publications can only be found when the publications are supported by external donors or researchers are involved in international projects at the EU level. Insufficient funding means that the field of media and journalism has been studied in a fragmented manner, with few studies able to cover the key issues. Thus, it can be concluded that the knowledge about the state of the media and journalism in Latvia is insufficient.

The previous conclusion is supported by the small number of academic and applied publication authors (12) who are regularly involved in the research of media and journalism and produce academic publications. Other authors have conducted studies on media or journalism once or a few times, as there are not enough opportunities in Latvia to pursue a research career in this field. Even more, less than ten doctoral dissertations have been defended since (2006) communication science doctoral studies have been available in Latvia.

On quality or publications. The quality of publications evaluated in the study is low: only 7% of publications are indexed in international scientific databases, and less than half are peer-reviewed. Latvia has very limited publishing opportunities, and high-level academic journals in social sciences are not published in Latvia. Research on media and journalism mostly evaluates Latvia's data (81%). Foreign researchers have no interest in the developments in the field of media and journalism, only 4% of analysed publications are written by foreign researchers, and most of them are related to comparative data analysis within the EU countries. The international research community has limited opportunities to get acquainted with the research of Latvian media and journalism, as half of the research publications are available in Latvian. The situation regarding the availability of data can be assessed as average – 60% of research belongs to open-access publications.

On the thematical structure of media and communication research. 43% of publications correspond to the Mediadelcom journalism domain categories, a third are dedicated to media use research, a sixth analyse media-related competencies, and 10% deal with regulation issues in media and journalism. It is important that the content of most publications qualifies for several categories of project domains. This means that media and journalism research lack a clear focus and the opportunity to analyse research problems in-depth. We have found few studies that have contributed to the development of media and communication theory. The data show that it is easier to define areas and fields that have not been explored than to identify those topics and problems for which research data are available. Only data on the use of media have been collected on a regular basis, and some serious research has been carried out to assess the professional approaches to journalism and the state of journalism in Latvia. In-depth analysis is lacking in several topics including trust in media, media management and economy, and there is a need for proper research to understand multimedia, digitalisation processes and social media and diverse practices and phenomena based on technological development in the context of journalistic work. Research on media competence and media regulation is underdeveloped. Especially problematic is the area of legal environment and self-regulation that is not properly studied during the period of time. There is no possibility to understand the Latvian media system as a whole.

Thus, the main risks for deliberative communication identifiable from the analysis of bibliographical data are:

Discontinuity of the research, sporadicity of data, lack of proper focus on the main values of democracy and deliberative communication, do not allow one to have informed, generalised expert insight on the situation. There is no strong tradition of research, with topics of the research mainly adopted from other countries and/or following the tendencies in the field of possible funding. There is little originality and no new paradigms that would allow one to grasp specificity of Latvian experience.

The lack of a national level research journal and the lack of a local, high level and data-supported discussion on changing media, audiences, and democratic society. Local academic research conclusions have no impact on policy, industry and users. There is research on interactions between media and politics, but it does not have the impact to change this relationship.

2. Low internationalisation of the research (a relatively small part of international level publications and participation in international projects) is leaving Latvian media research out of the loop – it is a cause of the low level of financing for media research followed by the low level of research that is a barrier to entering the international scene.

Main opportunities include:

Clearer structure of institutional conditions and requirements for research development (institutional structure, funding system etc.) in the last five years has increased the number of published open access peer-reviewed publications and internationally referenced data bases allowing the more consistent monitoring of the media and journalism field.

Development of doctoral studies in media and communication allowed an increased number of experts and scope of research questions as well as a varied and methodological diversity of research approaches – this signifies the possibility of new ideas and creative approaches in the research field.

Annex 1.

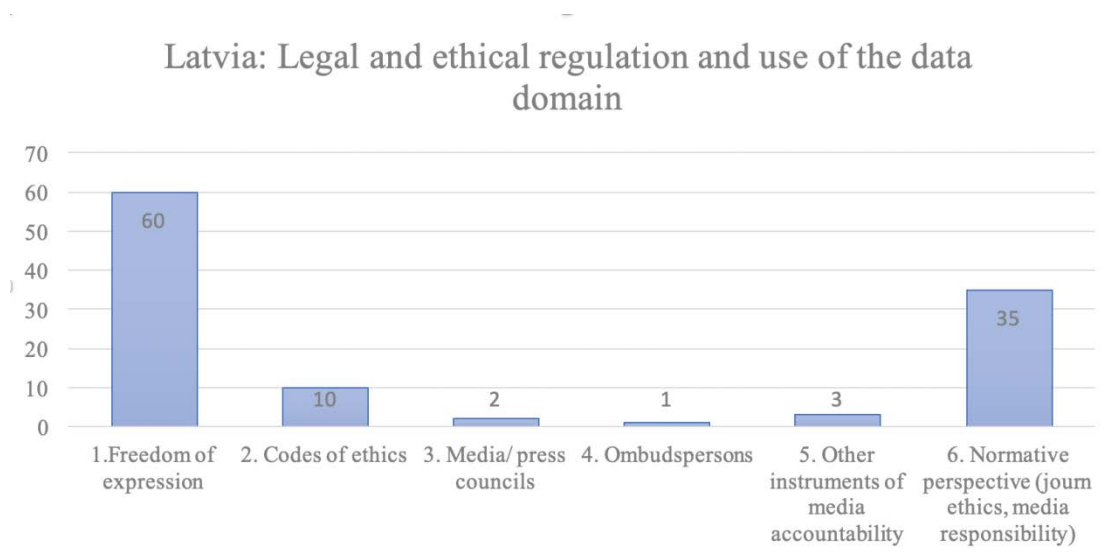Chart No. 1. Legal and Ethical Regulation Data Domain Structure (69 studies).

Latvia: Legal and ethical regulation and use of the data domain

Chart No. 2. Journalism Domain Structure.

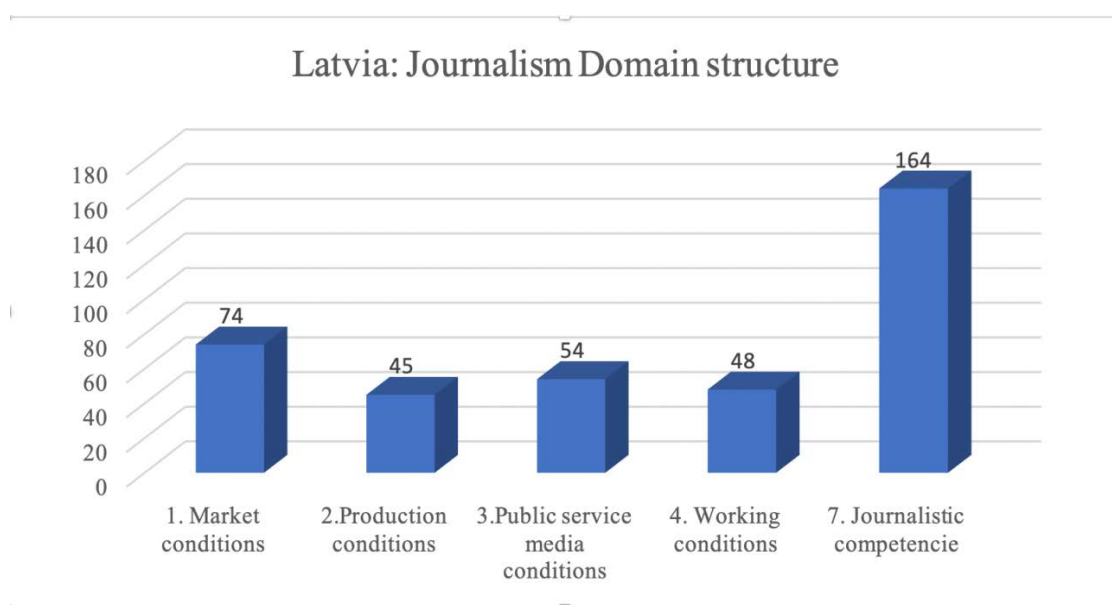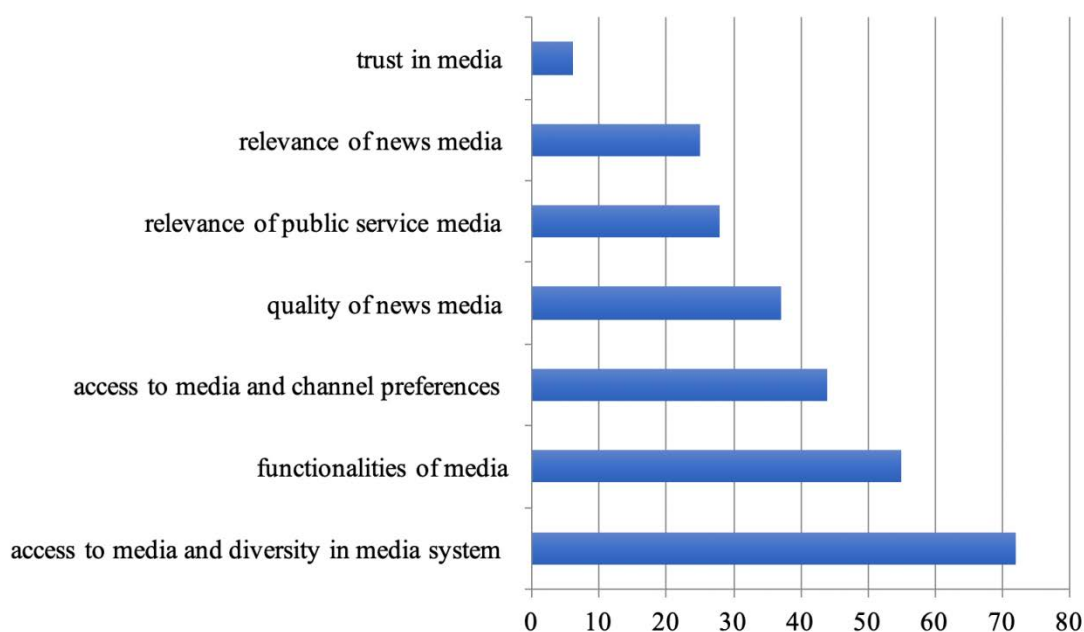Latvia: Journalism Domain structure

Chart No. 3. Latvia: Media Usage Domain Structure.

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